



When the third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey goes into the field this fall, the largest health examination survey in the world will begin to collect data on the health of Americans. The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey III (NHANES III) is the seventh in a series of health examinations conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) from the early 1960s. Since that time, these health surveys, with their unique combination of health interview and examination data, have provided a wide range of health and nutrition information available from no other source.

Overview of NHANES III

NHANES III is the most recent in a series of studies designed to assess the health and nutritional status of adults and children in the United States through interviews and direct physical examinations. For NHANES III, approximately 40,000 individuals in 88 communities throughout the United States will be randomly selected to participate. The detailed interview includes demographic, socioeconomic, dietary, and health-related questions. The examination component consists of medical and dental examinations, physiological measurements, and laboratory tests administered by highly trained medical personnel. The survey is conducted in mobile examination centers.

Data collection begins in September and will continue for approximately 6 years. The data collected in the survey will be used to estimate the prevalence of major diseases, nutritional disorders, and potential risk factors. NHANES III data also will be the basis for national standards for such measurements as height, weight, and blood pressure. Data from NHANES III will be used in epidemiologic and health sciences research, to direct and design health programs and services, and to expand the health knowledge for the nation.

Survey content. In NHANES III, data will be collected on the prevalence of chronic conditions in the population. Data on previously undiagnosed condi-

tions, as well as those known to and reported by the survey respondent, are produced. This capability is a particular strength of an examination survey; past surveys have shown that approximately 50 percent of respondents with diabetes or hypertension were not aware they had the condition.

The diseases and medical conditions to be studied in NHANES III include:

- heart disease
- asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema
- diabetes
- kidney disease and other urologic disorders
- gallbladder disease
- osteoporosis
- arthritis
- infectious diseases
- dental caries and periodontal disease
- allergies
- depression
- hearing loss
- iron deficiency anemia
- obesity.

Risk factors—those aspects of a person's lifestyle, constitution, heredity, or environment that may increase the chances of developing a certain disease or condition—will be examined in NHANES III. Smoking, alcohol consumption, physical activity, weight, dietary intake, and stress will be studied. Data on certain aspects of reproductive health, such as use of oral contraceptives and breastfeeding practices, also will be collected. The survey will include a test for HIV infection as one of its many laboratory tests.

Four areas have special emphasis in NHANES III: child health, health of older Americans, occupational health, and environmental health. A number of important areas in child health, including aspects of growth and development and cognitive functioning, will be addressed. Unlike previous health examination surveys, NHANES III has no upper age limit and is expected to significantly increase the knowledge of the health status of older Americans.

Through the occupational health component of the survey, data will be gathered on a variety of diseases and conditions related to the health of workers. For example, tests of hearing loss associated with occupational noise

levels are part of the examination. The environmental health research topic for NHANES III focuses on studying aspects of the environment, such as exposure to lead.

Survey operations. Examinations and interviews are conducted in specially equipped and designed mobile examination centers, which travel to survey locations throughout the country. The survey team consists of a physician, a dentist, medical and health technicians, and dietary and health interviewers. A large staff of interviewers conduct the household interview. In each location, local health and government officials are notified of the upcoming survey. Households in the survey receive an advance letter and booklet to introduce the survey.

The survey is designed to facilitate participation. Transportation and remuneration are provided and, with the respondent's permission, medical and dental findings are reported to each person's source of health care. The test for the HIV infection is administered anonymously, and neither the survey personnel nor the respondents know the results. Respondents who wish to learn if they are HIV-positive will be directed to alternative testing facilities in each community. As with each NCHS survey, all information is kept strictly confidential, as mandated by law.

The sample for the survey is selected to be representative of the U.S. population ages 2 months and older. To produce reliable statistics for blacks and Hispanics, these groups are oversampled for the survey. All participants receive a physical examination, body measurements, and dietary interview. Depending upon the age of the participant, the rest of the examination includes the following: dental examination, interview of health habits and behavior, cognitive and neurological tests, blood and urine tests, hearing tests, allergy skin tests, spirometry, electrocardiogram, x-rays, ultrasound examination of the gallbladder, and measurement of bone density. In general, the older the respondent, the more extensive the examination. Selected persons who are unable to come to the examination center may be given a less extensive examination in their home.

Survey data. The survey will be conducted in two 3-year segments, with data collected and analyzed at the end of the segments as well as for the full survey. Data from NHANES III will be made available through an extensive series of publications, public-use data tapes, and articles in scientific and technical journals. Research organizations, universities, health care providers, and educators will use the NHANES III data. Primary data users are the U.S. Public Health Service agencies that collaborated in the design and development of the survey. The National Institutes of Health, Food and Drug Administration, and Centers for Disease Control are among the agencies that rely upon NHANES III to provide data essential for the administration or evaluation of program activities. Expected application of NHANES III findings include decisions on fortification regulations for the nation's food supply, revision of growth charts used internationally by pediatricians to monitor the growth of children, and evaluation of programs to reduce hypertension and cholesterol levels in the population.

Findings from NHANES III will be used throughout the health and research community in a variety of settings. Data on the distribution of health problems and potential risk factors in the population provide researchers with important clues to the causes of disease. Information collected from this survey will be compared with data from previous surveys to allow health planners to determine the extent to which various health problems and risk factors have changed in the U.S. population over time. Priorities in health care and health research will be, in part, based on findings from NHANES III and other surveys. Drawing from the knowledge base created by NHANES III and its predecessors, agencies of the Government and the private sector will establish policies and plan research, education, and health promotion programs aimed at improving the current and future health of the American people.

1987 Catalog of Publications Now Available

NCHS has issued its catalog of publications for 1987. This comprehensive listing of reports from 1980 to the present is available without charge

from NCHS. The catalog lists and indexes the publications under major health topics. A listing of journal articles by NCHS staff published in 1987 is also included. To update the catalog, NCHS issues a quarterly "Publications Note." The issues for January-March 1988 and April-June 1988 are also available.

NCHS Data Line for 1987

The first NCHS Data Line appeared in *Public Health Reports* in the January-February 1987 issue and has been published in each issue since that time. The Data Line columns have been compiled and issued as a single reprint. The articles cover current NCHS programs and plans for upcoming activities and data releases. To request a copy, contact NCHS.

New Handbooks Issued

To improve the registration and reporting of vital events, NCHS has issued a new series of handbooks. The purpose of the handbooks is to promote better understanding of the vital records and the uses of information entered on them. The official national statistics on births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and other vital events depend upon complete and accurate reporting.

The handbooks are provided to State vital statistics offices and are intended to serve as models for adaptation by any vital registration area. The handbooks listed subsequently pertain to the 1989 revisions of the U.S. Standard Certificates and the 1977 revision of the Model State Vital Statistics Act and Regulations.

Medical Examiners' and Coroners' Handbook on Death Registration and Fetal Death Reporting

Funeral Directors' Handbook on Death Registration and Fetal Death Reporting

Physicians' Handbook on Medical Certification of Death

Hospitals' and Physicians' Handbook on Birth Registration and Fetal Death Reporting

Handbook on the Reporting of Induced Termination of Pregnancy

Handbook on Divorce Registration
Handbook on Marriage Registration
Guidelines for Reporting Occupation and Industry on Death Certificates

Other New Publications

Vital and Health Statistics Series 13, No. 95, Detailed Diagnoses and Procedures for Patients Discharged From Short-Stay Hospitals: United States, 1986; GPO Stock No. 017-022-01041-1; Price \$18

Vital and Health Statistics Series 13, No. 94, Office Visits to Psychiatrists: United States, 1985; GPO Stock No. 017-022-01040-2; Price \$2.25

Vital and Health Statistics Series 13, No. 93, The National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey: United States 1975-81 and 1985; GPO Stock No. 017-022-01044-5; Price \$2.75

Vital Statistics of the United States, 1984, Vol. I, Natality; GPO Stock No. 017-022-01031-3; Price \$32

Vital Statistics of the United States, 1985, Vol. I, Natality, GPO Stock No. 017-022-01036-4; Price \$25

Vital Statistics of the United States, 1985, Vol II, Mortality, Part A; GPO Stock No. 017-022-01034-8; Price \$37

Vital Statistics of the United States, 1985, Vol. II, Mortality, Part B: GPO Stock No. 017-022-10125-9; Price \$36

Advance Data No. 153—AIDS Knowledge and Attitudes for December 1987, Provisional Data from the National Health Interview Survey

Advance Data No. 154—Relationships Between Smoking and Other Unhealthy Habits: United States, 1985

Advance Data No. 155—Prevalence of Selected Chronic Conditions, United States, 1983-85

Advance Data No. 156—Utilization of Short-Stay Hospitals by Patients With AIDS: United States, 1984-86

Advance Data No. 157—Health of the Foreign-Born Population: United States, 1985-86

Clearinghouse on Health Indexes, No. 4, 1986, Bibliography on Health Indexes; GPO Stock No. 017-022-01043; Price \$2

Sale publications are available from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington DC 20402. All other publications are available directly from NCHS. For copies or more information, contact the Scientific and Technical Information Branch, 3700 East-West Highway, Hyattsville, Maryland 20782, or phone (301) 436-8500.

—SANDRA SMITH, MPH, Chief, Scientific and Technical Information Branch.